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The Singapore example

The National University of Singapore (NUS) Centre For the Arts¹ has a museum whose origins date back to 1949. It encompasses the University's artistic and social history heritage. Together with the University, which celebrates its 100th anniversary this year, it went through changes to arrive at its current position. Under the author's new leadership, the CFA Museum comprises three sections: 1) Collections & Operations, managing the museum's collections and operational matters, including security; 2) Development & Research, managing the curatorial functions, outreach and education programmes; and 3) Administration, managing finance, human resources, visitor services, administration & facilities and the new Baba House project (see below).

Since January 2005, the Museum has repositioned to focus more on research, collection and outreach to the NUS community, and the local and overseas public, through the use and study of material collection, analysis of Chinese artefacts and multidisciplinary collaborations with NUS departments and other universities.

The University Museum is regarded as a valuable resource in supporting teaching and research in the University in line with the NUS aspiration to become a global player in higher education. A recent strategic review by the University senior management has stressed the Museum's role in the context of helping the University become a leading global knowledge enterprise. It also plays a role in the soliciting of funds from benefactors who are patrons of the arts. With optimal use of its physical and intellectual assets, the Museum aspires to strengthen its contribution as a major resource centre for the University. The twenty-first century cycle of the museum thus begins

¹ NUS Centre For the Arts

Established in 1993, NUS Centre For the Arts (CFA) is a multi-faceted arts organization that nurtures triple arts – performing, visual and literary – on campus and beyond. CFA's three main functions are in the areas of management, programmes and education.

Besides managing 22 undergraduate groups in music, dance, drama, visual arts, film-making and production, CFA also manages the major arts facilities on campus: NUS Theatre, CFA Studios, University Cultural Centre (1,700-seat Hall, 350-seat Theatre) and Museum. CFA's forte also includes its skill in programming campus based concerts for a wide audience, to inject vitality into campus life.

with the review of its mission and a revamp of its governance structure and programmes. The following are the key points to align the museum's objectives to the University's mission:

Governance & Staffing

The new governance structure will take the form of a governing board with representatives from stakeholders in the University, academic faculties and relevant external organizations. This ensures firstly alignment with the University's vision, and secondly acquisitions that enhance the level and quality of museum activities relevant to the University community. Joint appointments by faculty members at the museum will also enable synergy and facilitate cooperation between departments and museum.

Resource Centre for Teaching and Research

The museum will develop into a strong teaching museum and serve as a resource for the University's teaching and research work by students and academics from Singapore and abroad. The collections audit exercise, which took one year to complete (from January to December 2005), identified a significant Chinese collection as well as Southeast Asian artefacts that are the earliest and most comprehensive in Singapore. The Museum aims to become the leading academic museum in the Southeast Asian region, specializing in Chinese, and South and Southeast Asian collections. It will use the collection for teaching and exhibition, adopting newer display approaches – e.g. visible storage or image digitization. To ensure the Museum's collections are properly managed and closely monitored, a robust online database system is being explored. All these initiatives will ensure that its 7,000-strong collection can be better promoted and presented to result in enhanced University and public awareness and usage.

Programmes

More resources will be needed for strong programming. There will be better harnessing of educational programmes developed by the Museum for use by the University community. This will present an opportunity to promote more visits by tourists and local residents and to introduce partnership programmes with the arts industry. In addition, the Museum will promote interdisciplinary exhibition projects, exhibitions of student projects and be a venue for student-generated exhibitions.

Moreover, the Museum will partner with Raffles Museum of Biodiversity Research² to offer a wider range and more comprehensive presentation of collections under the umbrella of NUS and ensure that the interests of the academic community in biology, history, architecture, language, culture and art will be adequately met.

² The Raffles Museum of Biodiversity Research (RMBR) is a worldwide renowned Museum in the same NUS Kent Ridge campus as the art museum. It has its origins in the Raffles Museum, established since 1849, as a result of an idea mooted by Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, founder of modern Singapore who was an eminent naturalist. The RMBR is built on the academic strengths of various faculty and postgraduate researchers involved in the research on various aspects of biodiversity, and the facilities and personnel of the animal, plant and fungal and bacterial collection.

Facilities

A significant capital investment is needed for adequate provision of space for exhibition, storage and workshops, adequate environmental control and security service to meet international standards, so as not to compromise gallery operations.

A glimpse of our collection

The museum's collection of over 7,000 art objects includes „stars” such as:

Material Culture – Oracles bones and Neolithic pots

This is possibly the only such permanent display in Southeast Asia (Il. I) of Chinese material culture.

Ceramics

The five major kilns of the Song Dynasty are represented (Qingbai, Longquan, Jizhou, Jun and Ding). There are also Han and Changsha (Tang) wares.

Bronzes

A small but fine collection dating to the Warring States, with special highlight of the Bronze Burial Mask from the Liao period.

Paintings

The Five Hundred Louhans (Il. II) is one of the only two artworks by Chen You, a seventeenth century artist. This handscroll is 26 metres long. His other work, which is smaller, is being kept at the Nanjing Museum. This piece was recently rated (during the museum's authentication exercise) by a veteran Shanghai expert as First Grade on an international scale.

Some of these works came into the Museum collection even before the National Museum, Singapore started collecting. The star piece is 'Dance' by Singaporean artist Chen Wen Hsi, which is fervently sought after on loan by overseas museums and 'Dancers' by Le Mayeur, which is our most valuable piece and donated by medical alumnus Prof. Arthur Lim.

Southeast Asian Ceramics

The Museum holds a good selection of Southeast Asian ceramics covering export ware from China, Vietnam, Thailand and Cambodia. If put on display, the exhibition would provide a good coverage of Southeast Asian ceramics which is not usually assembled in any museum in Southeast Asia, and even more rarely in the world.

Historical Paintings

The Charles Dyce (1816–1853) Collection of over 50 paintings (circa 1840s) is the largest single collection of historic paintings and of historic paintings and manuscripts in Singapore.

Baba House Museum

The museum will play an important role in conserving the distinctive Peranakan (Straits Chinese) heritage, as well as preserving the memory of a highly respected Malacca-based Peranakan community leader, Tun Dato Sri Tan Cheng Lock. Placed under the charge of the Museum, NUS Centre for the Arts, the (circa 1860) Baba House museum will be restored to its traditional state of grandeur. The purchase and restoration of the shophouse was made possible through a generous \$4 million donation by Agnes Tan, the last surviving child of Tan Cheng Lock. Baba House Museum will enhance the appreciation of restoration and conservation efforts on an authentic Peranakan structure, possibly the last surviving significant Peranakan house in Singapore. It will expose visitors to the customs and artefacts of the Peranakan community in a living context. Exhibitions and events held in this museum will showcase fascinating aspects of Peranakan heritage that are best captured in its eclectic mix of signature decorative ornaments, as well as in music and arts, cuisine, social customs and lifestyle.

A glimpse of our exhibitions

Our museum aims to foster a greater understanding and appreciation of its collection – to develop well researched scholarly exhibitions to differentiate from the state museums. It is our function as a resource and education centre to present new exhibitions of works selected from our permanent collection of Chinese material culture in ceramics, bronzes, calligraphies, paintings and also from the Southeast Asian collection. The new permanent collection exhibitions are accompanied by exhibition catalogues, brochures, guided tours and worksheets for students and the general public. More courses will be developed in relation to the continuous research of the collection with inputs from the other research departments in the university.

The NUS Story: 100 Years of Heritage exhibition covers a visual journey across a century of excellence in tertiary education. Over 400 photographs, archival documents, historical publications, memorabilia and multimedia presentations capture the richness as well as everyday simplicity of campus work and play. For the visitor, this is a nostalgic stroll from NUS' beginnings as a modest college to its stature as no. 18 among the world's best universities, as ranked by Times Higher Education Supplement (2004). From 30 June 2005–18 February 2005, *Dancing Ink & Brush* – an exchange exhibition which premiered at the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia – displays a total of fifty-four Chinese calligraphy scrolls and objects in Bronze, Ceramics, Carbon and Stones, dating from 9th–20th Centuries from our museum's collection. Chinese art advocates will enjoy the richness and versatility of an expressive medium of art.

The Museum's extensive collection of the rich Chinese material culture of 7,000 years unfolds before our eyes in the *Ways of Seeing Chinese Art* exhibition (till 2007).

A spectacular collection of ceramics, jades, bronzes and oracle bones tells the phenomenal story behind one of the world's greatest civilisations. These creations – inspired by natural, social and historical conditions – show the continuity, evolution and variation in Chinese cultural traditions.

New Exhibitions & the NX Gallery in 2006

New Exhibitions created in 2006 are part of a natural progression after an audit exercise of its collection. The museum plans to continue its research into the collection in order to showcase its strength.

A new gallery – NX Gallery – is conceptualised as a lifestyle gallery, reflecting art as a lifestyle encompassing cultural activities and provide a platform to host young creative ideas of all genres and introduce complementary and tie-up programmes with faculties in the university. For example, an exhibition planned on „The Keraton of Surakarta” started with an MA thesis work of a student in the Southeast Asian Studies department. This is an opportunity for realizing theoretical research into visual and educational display and allowing students to have an enriched and rounded educational experience.

New Exhibitions for 2006

The Museum plans to host several exhibitions in 2006, namely ‘SHO – the Japanese Calligraphy’ (from 1 March to 31 June), ‘Responding to the Divide – David Kwo’ (from 1 November to 30 June 2007); ‘Paintings from South & Southeast – Museum’s collection’ and ‘Ceramics from South & Southeast – Museum’s collection’ (both from September to December); ‘Presenting Electronic Music Lab’ (10 Feb 2006); ‘Exhibition of 2 Works by 3 Young Designers’ (from 4 to 31 March); ‘Jamu Exhibition’ (10 to 30 April); ‘The Keraton of Surakarta Exhibition’ (June to August); and the inauguration of the Baba House Museum (September).

Concluding remarks

Contrary to popular belief, time does not stand still in a museum. Tremendous change is happening in NUS, as it prepares for corporatisation³ in 2006 making the campus flatter, faster-moving, more flexible to meet the challenges of a global knowledge enterprise. So too is the Museum changing to stay relevant. A new step to explore for NUS is to have double appointments within the academia and the museum so

³ NUS will be incorporated as a not-for-profit university company limited by guarantee under the Companies Act. Corporatisation will allow the University to chart its own directions, within an agreed policy framework set by the Singapore Ministry of Education). NUS will have much greater latitude to decide on matters such as corporate governance, strategic initiatives and programmes, admission requirements and tuition fees. The greater nimbleness and flexibility from corporatisation will allow NUS to compete even more effectively and to be able to seize and capitalize on new opportunities as they emerge.

The Government has given its assurance that it will continue to be the principal source of funding for NUS. In addition, NUS would continue to proactively pursue alternative and additional sources of funding to supplement the funding provided by the Government. The additional resources would allow NUS to invest in our people, programmes and in new areas, so as to excel.

that the vision for the museum gains clarity within campus. Vigorously encouraging staff and students to use the museum as a classroom will be the next level of development. NUS Museum is first and foremost a *University* Museum, supporting its academic mission and yet it connects with the community, which is important for a *national* university.

Prior to 2005, the University Museum was autonomously managed, some say in splendid isolation from NUS. However, in the past years NUS – realising the inadequacy of the museum's delinked role and function from the campus – moved to establish a system where the Museum becomes intrinsically relevant to the campus and to its educational programming. This then is the light shed for university administrators, museum directors and curators – that a University Museum cannot operate like a state-run venue, oblivious of its basic context.

The University Museum will thus be integrated into the campus and be considered as a department where funds are allocated for facility, collection and the management of objects and resources.

Looking forward, the Museum has gained a fresh lease of life in the 21st Century, after examining its *raison d'être* in the turbulent years since its establishment. Its art and services are refreshed in a contemporary context in which its role and function have morphed to confidently meet the needs of a university museum in the twenty-first century.

STRESZCZENIE

Przykład Singapuru

Centrum Sztuki (CFA) Narodowego Uniwersytetu w Singapurze (NUS) jest postrzegane jako cenna jednostka wspierająca dydaktykę oraz badania uniwersyteckie, zgodnie z aspiracjami Narodowego Uniwersytetu, by stać się jedną z najważniejszych szkół wyższych. Niniejszy artykuł przedstawia praktyki muzealne, zagadnienia praktyczne oraz rozwiązania, mające na celu nadanie muzeum znaczenia narodowego zarówno w ramach kampusu, jak i społeczeństwa. Artykuł omawia historię muzeum, zbiory, system nadzoru właścicielskiego (*corporate governance*), obiekty i programy. Posiadając wyraźnie określoną tożsamość oraz przy lepszym wykorzystaniu potencjału materialnego i intelektualnego, Centrum Sztuki Narodowego Uniwersytetu w Singapurze ma nadzieję na wzmocnienie swojej roli jako ważnego ośrodka zasobów naukowych Uniwersytetu.



II. I. Pitcher (Gui), grey earthenware, late Neolithic (1,500 BCE) (31 x 14 cm; Accession No: NU30830-0). This vessel was used for cooking porridge. It shows that the users had a concept of structure and created the tripod so that it could stand over a small fire (courtesy Museum, NUS Centre for the Arts)



II. II. The Five Hundred Luohans by Chen You, Early Qing, 17th century (handscroll 32,5 x 2620; Accession No: CC2000-0003-001-0) (courtesy Museum, NUS Centre for the Arts)